

The Christian News-Letter

No. 225

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

January 10th, 1945

DEAR MEMBER,

Shortly before Christmas Lord Templewood, on his return from five years' residence as ambassador in Spain, described to the House of Lords the condition of Europe as he had seen it from the vantage-point of a European capital. He spoke of the bitter hatred and vendettas which German domination had left behind and the way in which it had undermined all moral standards wherever it had instilled its poison. The verdict of posterity might well be that, great as had been the material devastation caused by the war, the worst German crime had been the destruction of the moral values of Europe. His own direct experience had convinced him that the re-establishment of these values was fundamental to every other issue with which statesmen had to deal.

FUNDAMENTAL LIBERTIES IN EUROPE

The first step that needs to be taken, Lord Templewood urged, is to obtain for every man a guarantee of certain liberties, such as equality before the law, with no preferential treatment for members of any particular party; a unified system of justice, protecting men against arbitrary arrest and imprisonment without trial; racial equality; religious liberty; and free admission to the professions and public employment. Dealing with the objection that such proposals might meet with opposition from Russia, he pointed out that all these liberties are guaranteed in the Russian Constitution of 1936.

As practical measures, he suggested, first, that a convention should be signed by the United Nations, accepting and promising to safeguard these elementary human rights; and, secondly, the formation of a permanent body, somewhat similar to the International Labour Organization, to collect data, make reports, and help generally to raise the standard of respect for human rights.

Lord Samuel, who followed, agreed entirely with the diagnosis. He was more doubtful about the suggested method, first, because it seemed to offer a political cure for a spiritual malady; and, secondly, because it is difficult to see how the proposed arrangement would work in practice. To declare high purposes is easy enough. But we are living in an age in which many are not ashamed to proclaim their complete indifference to what is right, to justice and to the welfare of human beings. Experience has shown that democ-

racies can be overthrown through being deterred by loyalty to their own principles from acting with the vigour and speed of subversive movements. The undesired effect of imposing binding international obligations may be to weaken the power of action of the Governments which are most scrupulous in adhering to them. Lord Samuel was of opinion that to bring about the moral change that is needed we must look in the main, not so much to political measures, as to spiritual forces and, in particular, to the great organized religions.

The Lord Chancellor reminded the House that declarations of liberties have for a long time been common form in the constitutions of European States. The difficulty has always been to enforce them effectively when the need arises. In their absolute form such declarations cannot be applied to all circumstances; the right of public meeting must exist side-by-side with the right to disperse a seditious assembly, and the freedom of the press cannot be used to cover the publication of treasonable publications or direct incitements to crime. Who, then, is to decide whether in a particular instance Government is justified in disregarding the broad declarations of principle or is grossly defying them? Lord Simon made it plain, however, that these difficulties did not by any means rule out the possibility of establishing an organization which could do something, at least, to help to maintain standards of civic rights. And Lord Cranborne freely admitted that, while it would be easy for us to stand aside and leave Europe to die and putrify, the inevitable result of such negligence would be that the infection would spread and overwhelm us all. "From every point of view," he said, "it is our plain, simple duty to do what we can to heal Europe from her ills and to keep her in good health. It is our plain duty, and we must not fail."

THE DISINTEGRATION OF EUROPEAN SOCIETY

A background to the debate is supplied in a letter from one of our members, who has exceptional knowledge of conditions in Europe. He writes as follows:—

"Current events in Europe have sharply challenged any tendency to complacency about the future. The conventional standards of European society have long been sapped from within by an often unconscious repudiation of them; more recently they have been openly defied by the Nazis. Charity and good faith, even toleration and justice, are words which, for many, have lost their meaning. They grew out of bygone days, those who use them speak with voices from another world; those who pursue them are in the eyes of many like men who pluck the flowers when the flood is roaring down the valley. The first step is a plain recognition of the gravity of the disease, although to influence maladies in their acute phase is often beyond men's power.

"The people of Europe, during the war years, have been subjected to an order which for them has rested almost wholly on sanctions of force, not on principles of justice. When the conqueror has gone and the smoke of battle has been blown from the skies, it is not so easy to settle anew the foundations of the State.

" 'Resistance' movements have played a dramatic part in the struggle for liberation. But this fact in itself is, unfortunately, no guarantee of an assured political and social future. The resistance movements, having refused to recognize the laws of the 'order' under which they have suffered, have created laws of their own supported by implicit understandings, and designed solely to create and release the force necessary for liberation from the enemy. This object accomplished, it is natural to suppose that the group energy and the gang or team spirit that brought about this result can accomplish what effete statecraft failed to do, and carry through the colossal task of national regeneration and unification. Too late it is perceived that the treatment of the national disease by these means is dangerous to the patient. Political convalescence and restoration are not tasks for group energy or gang enthusiasm ; they demand a sensitive re-division of relationships, a re-examination of purposes, an insight into the growth of association within the nation, and a search for that limitation of ambition and design which is necessary for dealing with a multitude of concrete issues and the carrying out of a practical policy.

"Nothing is more important for the future of Europe than that its peoples should learn to distinguish clearly between genuine and (in Mr. Churchill's phrase) 'swindle' democracy and between true and false freedom. It is one of the dangers of the modern conception of freedom that it is assumed that its nature and purpose are fully understood. But many to-day are grasping for a freedom that has no relation to the social context and is a figment of an individualism that constantly degenerates into libertinism.

"The secure possession of basic human rights is more important for most men than democratic forms of government. Experience shows that these rights can be secured under different forms of government. Without them democracy, in the sense of majority rule, may be scarcely distinguishable from absolute tyranny. Democracy can thrive only when the delicate balance of privileges and obligations is resolutely maintained.

"Deeds have been done in these years whose imprint cannot be easily effaced. It would be a mistake to think that the page can be obliterated or its dark passages readily forgotten. Wounds have been inflicted from which recovery will be slow and difficult. All that Europe has meant to man's development is at stake. It will be determined in the years immediately before us whether our civiliza-

tion can find for itself fresh springs of repentance and hope ; or whether, after a course of meteoric brilliance, in which it has illuminated the world, its light will be finally extinguished. The question obviously presents itself whether Christianity has the power to bring renewal to a civilization that is plainly disintegrating. To so profound a question history alone can supply the answer. But the first step is a correct and vivid understanding of the situation in which we have to live and act."

The letter which has just been quoted was shown to a visitor from the continent who has a wide knowledge of the European Churches. He agreed with the diagnosis, and laid the strongest emphasis on the way in which Nazi nihilism has both revealed and intensified the decay of European society. Its virulent poison has spread throughout the whole continent. The new fact in European history is that there is now complete and explicit disagreement about the purposes for which men associate in society.

The spread of the infection has been made easier by the atmosphere of falsehood, disregard of law and recourse to violence, which have become part of the everyday life of large numbers of men and women throughout the continent. Things which were once considered immoral have become normal forms of action and an expression of patriotic duty. The re-establishment of stable patterns of social and political behaviour has been made immeasurably harder. The whole situation is aggravated by the conditions of mass existence to which multitudes have been reduced by the deportations of populations, the break-up of families, the forcing of the middle classes into the ranks of the proletariat, and the homelessness of those who have been bombed.

In spite of all this, the continental observer insists, there is another side to the picture which must not be overlooked. In resistance to tyranny, freedom and national solidarity have for millions acquired a new vital meaning. Freedom has been realized as something for which no price is too high to be paid. Confronted by wanton and senseless cruelty and blind destruction, many have rediscovered the dignity of the human person and been ready to risk their own lives to save the victims of persecution. The excesses of injustice have re-awakened in many quarters a new understanding of the place of law in human life and rekindled a passion for justice and equity.

WHAT CAN WE DO ?

What then can we do in this crisis in the life of mankind ? What is at stake is respect for the human person and the defence of his elementary rights and liberties. How can there be brought into existence a positive force powerful enough to reverse the tides which are hurrying civilization to disaster ?

It would be the greatest mistake to suppose that Great Britain and America are immune from the canker which is eating into the vitals of European society. Among ourselves also the selfish interests of individuals and groups is obscuring a right understanding of freedom and undermining the essential foundations of democratic life. A picture of Europe as the patient and ourselves as the health-bringing doctor is quite contrary to the truth. We have been spared thus far from the acute conflicts which have created disorder in countries that have been subject to German occupation. The poison of nihilism has penetrated less widely and deeply into our national life than has happened elsewhere. But the evils that are devouring Europe have also infected our own life, and we have to be saved ourselves if we are to help in saving others.

SELF-EXAMINATION

If we are to do anything to change the situation, the first step is self-examination. The only force that can prevail against tyranny and inhumanity is an unconquerable faith in the dignity of the human person as a child of God and a reverence for man as man. How strong is this conviction and habit in ourselves?

A test by which we may judge the depth and force of our ultimate beliefs is our attitude to the obliteration of enemy cities by bombing. We have written on this subject before (C.N.-L. Nos. 147, 181, 202). There has been no marked change in the situation, except that the invasion of Germany has helped to place bombing from the air as a method of war in truer perspective. German cities within reach of our guns are as remorselessly destroyed by their shells as by bombs from aeroplanes. The bombardment of defended towns has always been a part of war; the difference is only in the greater deadliness of modern weapons, whether the missiles are projected from the ground or from the air.

The position we have taken about the bombing of enemy cities may be summed up in three assertions.

First, it is difficult to feel sympathy, or even patience, with those in this country and America who plead in the name of Christianity or humanity for restrictions on bombing, but refrain from stating clearly whether they intend, or do not intend, that the range of air attack should be restricted, even if this involves the prolongation, or conceivably the loss, of the war. No one can feel confident in the light of what is happening that the United Nations will use victory successfully to lay the foundations of international peace and justice. But any weakening of their military effort at this stage would produce chaos so appalling that all hopes for human betterment would be dashed for generations. Those who press on Governments that they should stay their hand must, if they want

to act as responsible citizens, make clear their attitude to these consequences.

Secondly, we have always maintained that there is a clear distinction between the use of violence necessary for the attainment of military objectives and wanton destruction. The observance of this distinction is primarily a responsibility of those who direct and execute military operations. Civilians seldom have the data required for a right judgment. If there were a flagrant use of violence in excess of military necessities a public protest would be called for.

Thirdly, the destruction of entire cities brings home to us the utter hideousness of modern war. It is not only the immeasurable toll of human pain and misery that we have to deplore, but the effect on men's characters and souls. Correspondents from neutral countries who have visited bombed cities describe the apathy, callousness and complete indifference to the sufferings of others to which large sections of the population are reduced. The effect of our actions is to bring about on a vast scale a process of dehumanisation which is the most complete contradiction imaginable of the purpose of God, as Christians understand that purpose. If we are compelled to continue such actions in order to avert a still greater evil, this must not blind us to what we are doing, nor allow us to escape from its horror by taking refuge in the righteousness of our cause. We must not shrink from facing the anguish of our predicament that the only means that we can see of vindicating human rights is by participating in their violation and in a process of ruthless dehumanisation. The more vigorously we prosecute the war in the conviction that there is no road to better things except by going through with it, the more every necessary act of war ought to become a prayer for forgiveness and for the reconversion of our hearts and minds to a love of mercy and justice, and of all the things that belong to a humane society.

It is for the indispensable task of recreating in men an understanding of the true values of life that more than one of the statesmen who took part in the debate in the House of Lords turned with expectation to the representatives of religion. The potential contribution of the Christian Churches was the theme of a speech by the Bishop of Chichester which is reproduced as a Supplement to this News-Letter. The responsibilities of the Churches are as real and the opportunities as great as the Bishop has said. But it is only too patent to many, both within and outside the Church, that before the possibilities can be realized, the Churches must themselves undergo conversion.

NATIONAL POLICY

The second responsibility is to make up our minds and exert such influence as we can in matters of national policy. Lord Cecil

of Chelwood insisted in the debate in the House of Lords that one thing that Governments can do is to preserve in their own conduct a high standard of international action. "It is no use," he said, "setting up a most elaborate organization for improving international affairs, or even creating such a body as my noble friend desires in order to inculcate better conduct on the part of Governments, if the Allied Governments who are the authors of these adjurations are carrying on a policy which is very difficult to square with anything like an improved international morale."

We may take for illustration the question of the future of Poland. It is proposed, according to the Prime Minister's statement in the House of Commons, that Poland should be compensated for the surrender of about a third of its pre-war territory to Russia by the annexation not only of East Prussia with two million Germans, but of certain undefined but considerable German areas to the west of Poland, and that there should be a total expulsion of the German population of these areas, amounting to "several millions."

There are some frontier adjustments in Europe which it may be wise to make. There are others which it may not be in the power of this country successfully to oppose, however much we dislike them. If there are going to be territorial changes, experience in the past of minority problems and of German fifth columns may make it seem the lesser evil that the present populations should be removed elsewhere rather than remain as a festering sore.

But the fact that such proposals can be seriously entertained ought to open our eyes to the chasm opening before European civilization. The forcible removal of millions of human beings from their ancestral soil and homes must, even under the most favourable conditions, involve acute pain and vast material loss, and in the circumstances prevailing at the end of the war may easily lead to starvation, large-scale loss of life and the most abject misery. As Commander Stephen King-Hall pertinently asks in the *National News-Letter*, "does any sane person imagine that, if to the huge task of voluntary migration (affecting according to some estimates ten million people) we add an equally large job of enforced migration, we shall ever in our lifetime see even the beginnings of a settled and recovering Europe?" The uprooting of human beings on a vast scale is a violation of human rights that would have been unthinkable a generation or two ago and that must be intolerable to Christian minds. The fact that a British Prime Minister should have found it necessary to defend such a policy in Parliament shows what strides we have all taken in our thinking towards acceptance of the power state with its utter ruthlessness and disregard of the individual and of his rights and liberties.

What ought to be the decision of Governments confronted with this awful choice is a political judgment which requires a far fuller

examination of the problem in its many aspects than is possible here. But it would be disastrous to conceal from ourselves that we are being driven into courses which are so utterly wrong in themselves, and so destructive of anything that can be called civilization, that we are compelled to ask whether any resultant benefit, even the prospect of peace itself, can justify them.

PRACTICAL SERVICE

Thirdly—a matter to which we shall come back—there are endless opportunities for the practical services by which abstract rights are converted into actual liberties. In many cities of Europe, for example, and over wider areas, the public and municipal services have broken down and provision for the basic needs of life is lacking. People are hungry, cold, apathetic and on edge. Hundreds of thousands are reckoned to be on the verge of complete nervous collapse. These conditions are the result of the long weary struggle just to keep warm, dry and fed. If we can imagine what sort of state our tempers and our moral principles would be in, if for the last four years we had not had more than one hot meal a week, no hot baths, no soap, no electric light, no means of bringing into cities food lying in the countryside, we should realize the urgency of doing everything possible to re-establish the public services. Christians ought to be among the first to co-operate with anybody and everybody who is willing to lend a hand.

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

The Christian News-Letter has been from the beginning a co-operative undertaking, and many besides the editor have contributed to what has appeared under his name. No issue assumes its final form without being submitted to the Editorial Board, which meets regularly every fortnight. In particular, Mrs. Bliss has for two years taken a large and increasing part in the editing of the News-Letter and has been responsible for a great deal more in it than the contributions to which her signature has been attached. As the range of topics grows, and in particular now that connections have been re-opened with the Churches in Europe, the work will be shared in increasing measure. While we both remain jointly responsible for what appears in the News-Letter, Letters in the preparation of which she has taken the major share will in future bear her signature.

Yours sincerely,

D. H. Deane

THE CHURCHES AND EUROPEAN RECONSTRUCTION¹

By THE BISHOP OF CHICHESTER

My Lords, there are many factors which make the realization of European unity peculiarly difficult to-day. I agree with the noble Viscount, Lord Templewood, that a preliminary necessity is the ending of German military aggression. But allowing for that there are other obstacles. Some are material, arising directly out of the sufferings and losses of the war ; some are political, and have to do with the decline of European Great Powers and the rise of World Powers with their desire for spheres of influence in Europe. But I think that the chief obstacle is spiritual, a profound distrust of nation for nation, Party for Party and citizen for citizen, together with an increasing moral disintegration.

In order, therefore, to rebuild the underlying European unity, and to secure for every European citizen certain fundamental rights, we have to go beyond politics. Not only has Europe never attained political organization as a real society of peoples, but something deeper than a political impulse is required to secure lasting unity now. I suggest that we are more likely to achieve the goal of European unity if we build on the culture which all European peoples have in common. The peoples of Europe all possess a common form of culture, based on four common spiritual traditions. There is the humanist tradition, which lies behind the literary and intellectual culture of the educated classes and is largely responsible for the liberal and humanitarian element in our civilization. There is the scientific tradition, perhaps the clearest example of the part played by intellectual collaboration in European culture. There is the tradition of law and government which, while naturally more affected by national political divisions, possesses important common elements which distinguish European from Asiatic society. Lastly, there is the Christian religion, which provided the original bond of unity between European peoples and has influenced every part of Europe and every section of European society.

All these traditions are important, but it is the last which seems to me the most important and potentially unifying of them all. Few will deny that of all the crises in which we are involved the spiritual crisis is the gravest. The fundamental menace to our civilization is not Communism but Nihilism.

¹ Speech in the debate in the House of Lords on December 19th, 1944.

I was much struck by the reflections which fell from the noble Viscount, Lord Templewood, as to the possibility of a permanent body carefully composed for improving and advising on and raising moral standards. My noble friend Lord Samuel has already expressed the conviction that the best charters and Constitutions are of little avail without religion. I am in full sympathy with his plea for the co-operation of the religions of the world for the general deepening of spiritual forces in all the continents. It will not be disputed, however, that when we speak of religion in Europe, it must be the Christian religion with which we have to deal. Two facts emphasize the significance of Christianity as a great unifying force for Europe, one permanent, the other bound up with our contemporary situation. The permanent fact is that in spite of the deep differences in the dogmatic field, there is still such a thing as a common Christian faith. The contemporary fact is that throughout the World War men of all the Churches have stood together against dictatorship, and have stood side by side with the men of the resistance movements. I do not say that the Church opposition has been on the same scale in every country. But the point is that all over Europe, from Trondhjem to Athens, from Stalingrad to Toulouse there is a network of organized Christian bodies—Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox—giving witness to those fundamental rights and liberties without which European civilization cannot continue. The principles which are directing the Church opposition to Nazi dictatorship in the war are not likely to be abandoned when reconstruction begins, and there is every reason to look for the continued co-operation of Christians of all Churches in following those principles up.

Allow me to remind your Lordships of various statements made by the Pope on the principles of reconstruction. There was his first Encyclical at the beginning of the war, *Summi Pontificatus*; there were his famous five points on Christmas Eve, 1939, and his subsequent allocutions to the Cardinals. His most recent plea for co-operation between the Roman Catholics and other Christians was made on the fifth anniversary of the war, September 1. Speaking of the co-operation of men of different camps as "companions in arms for the great enterprise of reconstructing a world which has been shaken to its foundations," he said:—

"There could be nothing more natural or more timely; nothing—given the necessary precautions—more proper for all those who pride themselves on the name of Christian and who profess their faith in Christ, with a life conforming exactly to His laws. This disposition and readiness to work together in a spirit of genuine brotherly harmony not only answers to the moral obligation to fulfil one's civic duty, but rises to the dignity of a postulate of conscience, sustained and guided by the love of God and of one's neighbour, with added strength given by the warning signs of the moment and by the intensity of effort called for in order to save the nations."

There is a similar movement for co-operation in reconstruction among those who are not Roman Catholics. On this side I can speak from intimate personal experience. There is the World Council of the Churches in process of formation, in the shaping of which the Protestant and Orthodox Churches of Europe, and all the Churches of the British Isles, and the American Churches have been for several years actively associated. Its principal purpose is to facilitate common action by the Churches, to promote co-operation in study, to promote the growth of an Ecumenical consciousness in the members of all the Churches. The late Archbishop of Canterbury was its President. The leaders of the American Churches are its active supporters. But the point to which I wish to call special attention is this. Under its auspices a Reconstruction Department has been lately formed with the special object of assisting in the re-building of Christian institutions in Europe. It represents a common effort on the non-Roman Catholic side to relieve and rehabilitate all the suffering Churches. No Church, either of friend or foe, is in principle excluded. Nor do the more prosperous Churches pose as patrons. The receiving and giving Churches are both upon the controlling committee. The Churches have not the resources of States, but, while the material side is necessary, it is not the principal point in a reconstruction crusade. If the Churches can together by common action help to restore the foundations of European life and bring new hope and life to the nations in which they minister, the results will be very far-reaching.

I would add a special word upon the part which the Church of Russia might play in the general work of Christian reconstruction. The causes for which the World Council stands, notably reconstruction, are causes in which the Church of Russia's aid would be of outstanding value. There are many Churches, especially in Eastern and Northern Europe—the Orthodox Churches in the Balkan countries, the Evangelical, Lutheran, and Reformed Churches and some Orthodox Churches in Northern countries, the Reformed Churches and the Protestant Churches of the Augsburg Confession in Yugoslavia, Hungary and Rumania—in relation to which the co-operation of the Russian Church with the World Council of Churches would be the greatest possible gain. It would be a great satisfaction to see the Russian Church take the prominent part in the World Council of Churches and in reconstruction generally to which its history and achievements entitle it.

I have spoken of the connection of the Church in the occupied countries with the resistance movements. There is in these resistance movements a real spiritual quality. They stand for the European spiritual traditions of humanism, science, law and government; and a natural bond has been shown to exist between patriotic men

with different backgrounds, in the Church and outside the Church, inspired by a passion for freedom and justice. The Church, be it Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox, has a unifying function to fulfil in the days which follow the liberation. Members of the Church opposition to dictatorship must stand side by side with old friends of the resistance movements in the permanent safeguarding of civic rights. It would be tragic if misunderstandings or even rival organizations were to develop between the Churches and the trade unions on the Continent after their common resistance to the Nazis in the war. The Church must take its full part with trade unionists and all men of good will in the task of improving social conditions and developing the political and social conscience. Trade Unionists are not pagans.

Further, in the safeguarding of civic rights, the Church—Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox—must also think of the large masses of the population who are unable to speak for themselves. After liberation there is a danger of civil strife. In all occupied countries there are collaborators or Quislings—sometimes very few—and there are resisters. But there is also the non-political man-in-the-street, and he, I suppose, as a rule comprises the great majority of the population. His rights require protection. So, just as in Athens, the Greek nation seems inclined to look to the Primate of the Greek Church, Archbishop Damaskinos, for a rôle of mediation, I see in other countries the possibility of a rôle of mediation for the Church. I must crave the indulgence of your Lordships for speaking so much of the contribution which the Church has to offer for the unifying of Europe, but, after all, the Christian religion was the original bond of unity among the European peoples. I believe that in a time of distress and moral disintegration like the present, the Christian religion, together with the other spiritual traditions—humanism, science, law and government—may still prove one of the great unifying forces of Europe, one of the principal agencies for ensuring his fundamental rights and liberties to every European citizen.

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